

# Interview with Professor Gussnor

## THIS IS IT. Darshan Diary. SATURDAY 7 MAY 1977

Anima came to Poona a few weeks ago with a companion, Robert Gussnor Professor of comparative Religions at the University of Vermont. He is preparing a paper on modern religions in India and particularly wanted to include a section on Osho and what he is doing. Professor Gussnor came to Darshan and spoke briefly to Osho when he first arrived but did not take sannyas.

Maneesha talked to him a couple of days after he arrived and said "It gave me new perspective of what is happening here because, of course, he spoke of Osho and the work (except we call it play!) that is happening, in very intellectual terms. And though it took lots of words to say it, it seemed his heart was touched little as well!

**Maneesha:** How did you find the lectures you went to?

**Gussnor:** I found it especially helpful the systematic lectures on tantra-awareness one, awareness two, awareness three, the four stages: the awareness of the object, subject, the awareness of time and the dropping of the subject/object, the awareness of space.

I'm coming to the feeling that Gurdjeff's way of explaining things is best—that it is best to emphasise the pathology of ordinary consciousness. I really think that's something modern people can hear and see and they can feel the contrast with conscious awareness of objects. They can feel that and I think that they'll want to make the transition. And it's a modern way of convincing people of sin—that ordinary consciousness is in fact very low grade.

The other thing I liked is the freeing of people from social conditioning—a strong emphasis on the need of a deep conditioning before you can make a proper entry into meditation. I think that's right—you have to relax to include among the objects that you see in your awareness the terrific patterning, the terrific automatism, the terrific mechanistic way.

And students can certainly hear that, because now with the job shortage in America, they're caught between the counter-culture emphasis of 'do your own thing and don't let anybody condition you', and feeling that they've got to shape up to get a job; so that it's really a turbulent time. It's like a warm Gulf current is meeting a cold current and there are a lot of storms as a result.

And I think that the counter-culture emphasis on freedom has fallen on ill days and is really in retreat and that some sort of strong affirmation—that you can make an alternative life and you can become consciously aware and you can avoid the death of a corporate life—is needed, because what everybody is trying to do is get prepared professionally very early, to get the job, thinking that it will give them the freedom to have an esoteric life—style somewhere out in a geodesic dome in the woods. And I don't think that they're sufficiently aware of the way in which they can get ground down into suburbia externally, but even more so internally. I think people are just not aware of how suggestible they are, how trained they are, how they're not going to be able to live freely.

So I see what's happening here and the motifs that Osho emphasises as happening elsewhere. But he's ahead of the trend in two senses—one, more forcefully and thoroughly analysing what's happening and what is needed, ahead of

them that way .. .. But it's a ground-swell, it's happening everywhere. There's a wave that is coming behind him or he's riding the cutting edge of the wave.

And secondly, I think he's ahead in drawing the bold conclusions about de-patterning, de-conditioning, relaxation, and actually doing it-what has to be done-and then doing all of this in the context of what I would call, you can call it anything you want but I call, absolutistic mysticism. Other people aren't doing it in that context-they're doing it in the context of the next phase of the sensate culture. I think he's ahead in those two ways; but it's happening everywhere.

I think it's the wave of the future and if it's set in the mystical context it could just benefit so many people's lives, because 80% of the students have the same identical problems and yet it's not articulated by themselves or anybody else, so .. ..

Every lecture he gives bears on that. I have a very positive feeling towards the lectures. At the same time, every lecture I find things that are reflex: I can't accept that that's not right, something he says is not well-stated, or it's incomplete, or it's not in perspective, or his grasp of the West is a little uneven there.

When I think about it, I say 'Okay, how would you try to say it better?' If you try to say it better, you say it prosaically, you don't say poetically. And then half the time I come to the conclusion that there is a blind spot in myself or an example of reflex conditioning again. So you know, I've gone every day because I really liked, enjoyed, the unexpected things that always happen.

**Maneesha:** In coming here was there any personal investment for you? Do you see yourself personally as a seeker or has it been just an academic adventure?

**Gussnor:** Well, as I explained to some other people before, I've had an involvement with the Ramakrishna-Vedanta people and have taken their kind of meditation and their kind of mantra and began to form a relationship with a senior Swami in Boston. And I think even one of Osho's tapes that was played

at the camp—the Kabir series—mention that if you have a living teacher, stay with it.

What's happening in the academic study of religions for some people now—especially those that have been, that are, at the Harvard School and were trained by Kentwell Smith—is that they are trying to combine personal involvement with being as rigorously accurate as they can. This means discarding objectivity as the ideal of the academic life. To understand something is to enter into it enough to see the point of it for people.

One of Smith's favourite sayings is, 'Anybody who engages in this kind of study—where they try to write up something that is accurate and cogent both to the inside and the outside—is risking changing themselves. To know is to be come in this kind of field.'

So at least *some* departments in *some* universities in the states now are engaged, whether they know it or not, in rethinking the meaning the academic tradition has had since the University was founded in Paris in the 1200's. Because objectivity isn't where it's at for our whole department. The old saw used to be 'we don't teach religion, we teach *about* religion', but now we know that religion is religiousness—an engagement with symbols—and you don't teach about that unless somebody's musical to it. You have to use your own being and get in touch with those things yourself if you want to do justice to it.

It's no more fair to write about sannyasins at Osho ashram objectively—it's no more moral—than it would be to write about women or ghetto residents in such a way that women or ghetto residents didn't see themselves at all and felt they had been slandered, and were outraged.

I mean, social scientists still sometimes do that, but if the insider does not see himself accurately there, I think the thing fails as an academic, a sheerly academic undertaking enterprise.

So. Yes, involved—sure. The question really comes down to: 'You participate up to a *point*'—that's what people say. Well, I don't think that ideas cogent—nobody has ever succeeded in showing what that point is or why there should be a point, nobody is



ever given a rationale for stopping. And the whole open/closed issue is a *very, very* slippery one.

So I am not ultimately convinced that some sort of compromise between participation, detachment, openness and closedness is going to be possible to prevent the University, to obviate the necessity of the University coming to grips with the deeper issues. I don't think there's any halfway house possible. And people are pretty confident of it, you know: we can participate and see the point of it and write up something that is agreeable to the insiders without ourselves having to undergo a decisive experiment.

The place I think that thinkers are fuzzy is this business of experiment, if you're up against your religious tradition and your studies—interesting way to put it I think, 'up against', but still we feel that way a lot of times—that says you've got to make an experiment on yourself .. .. And experiment is precisely that: the outcome of which can be changed ideas, changed being, changed living.

If you're going into it as an experiment but somehow if it's an experiment where those changes are precluded or won't be accepted by your colleagues, then it's not a real experiment. But I'm not sure that you can have it both ways—where there is an experiment but it's not yet an experiment.

And people say ' Well, the University has always been this historically, a true University is that' .. .. as if there's some archetype up in the sky of what a true University is and you can gauge them one against the other and you can say ' this is a true University or not a true University'.

I take the position that the University historically has been what it does—there is no once and for all, fixed, frozen form what a true University is, or what the academic tradition is.

**Maneesha:** How do you feel about Osho with his views on academia? And he's a former professor himself ..

**Gussnor:** Yes, he's of interest to Professor's not only because he is a 'come-outer' from one of us, but of all the guru's I

suppose he is the most intellectual, certainly as comparative, most wide-ranged. I think he is the first major guru in the world whose central focus probably is outside of his own tradition. It's in, the Zen and the Tao and with the help of the Tantra- which is and tie-nomian and anti-social-and is sometimes out casted in Hindu tradition as an auxiliary prop, although I realise that chronologically, he was speaking about the Tantra first, which is natural.

He's an Indian and he took that part of the Indian tradition first and expanded upon it, but then he found the affinities. Chuang Tzu and Lao Tzu and the Zen Masters seem to me to be central, and he selects the Sufis and the Christian interpretations and the Jewish Hassidic mystics are outside the social and mainstream institutions.

So he's the first comparative guru. It's very unusual to find anywhere, in the academic tradition especially, any person who started out professing to be open and impartial, doesn't end up with their own tradition.

Now Osho starts out as a Jainia-that's an orthodox commune, it's a closed, fixed community that's lasted 25 centuries-but he ends up really centred outside of his tradition, and that's unusual.

That has to be impressive and a matter of preponderate when you talk about exploring and experiment. It indicates that there is a real freedom operating there.

**Maneesha:** Do you get a sense of someone who is not just incredibly knowledgeable, but that what he's saying is? ..

**Gussnor:** No, no, he rings true to me as an enlightened being. I've had the privilege of meeting I suppose, 15 or more senior Swami's who are regarding as having got something in the Ramakrishna Order, including some of the early disciples of swami Shri Ramananda-Swami akilananda, , swami vitrananda, Swami vishuananda in Chicago- and I think they were not ordinary disciples. You get a feeling after while of the constancy of the joy and bliss and the ability to keep going and keep going and keep going without it being an effort.

So I feel he's that way. He's certainly an enlightened being—he has got something, he has found something. I am not competent to talk about degrees of samadhi—sadiculpa, samadhi, and the Sadipatta and nirvitakta and nirviculpa samadhi and those things—nor would I want to talk about the rather elaborate way that Hindus have of making distinctions between enlightened beings all of whom are enlightened.

Some traditional theories of the avatara, the incarnations, say at least before things must be there: he starts a civilisation, he's able to give enlightenment at a touch to people who are not fit, are not ready, and to whom the waters of enlightenment are *not* close to the surface .. ..it's not a matter of finding any well where the waters close in new move some boards and will then there's the waters close, but it's rather like an engineer who sinks a deep well in the desert .. .. and that very have to know their mission from childhood and have enlightenment experiences early, and that they come surrounded by 10 to 15 very high-quality souls who spread their mission.

They say without those for things, you're not dealing with an avatar. You may be dealing with someone who's ever-freed all who can raise the consciousness of a whole crowd of people very dramatically so that they don't know where they are at for three or four days—they're banging their heads on the iron fence posts to see if it's real or will the two things penetrate into each other.

So I don't know about all the difference between an avatar and an ever-free soul and ordinary enlightened beings. Even within a class of ordinary enlightened beings, some are said to be ferry boats and some are said to be rowboats and some can only take a few people across.

Now, Indians make a great deal of the differences between enlightened beings but all I say is, he seems the same to me as some of the second, third generation disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. There's that same incredible love, there is that same incredible ability to answer the questioner rather than the question, there is that same incredible permanent high, there is that same unfailing vitality, freedom from ups and downs, and



an ability, when giving expression to something, to go to the heart of the matter with deftness and with charm and the same artistry through it all.

Plus each Swami has individual characteristics and his is .. They're the same in some ways, yet they maintain the idiosyncratic, a little of the individual. And there he is different—his knowledge, his range of knowledge and his gift of the story-telling, his sense of timing, the artist and poet is much more marked. He *unfailingly* hits the right word. It's always tasteful and striking, never trite. Amazing .. amazing, the aptness of the way he does it.

And so many subjects he touched on: the silencing words, mudra, gesture, the mantra. I've heard them touched on before but never really understood them. But the sound of one hand clapping thing—he gives a very deep exposition; it's better than any given in books. I've given lectures on Lien Chi and read stuff, but he's read things I haven't managed to get my hands on, and he's put the lecture together better and also he's added his own insights to it. So by whatever standard you want to judge him—whether it's the platform person as a doer, in terms of his being—I think he has extraordinary dimensions, stature, size, power.

I think you're in different hands, but I think you're in good hands with Osho! (He laughs)

**Maneesha:** I'm just thinking how different our perceptions are because I feel him very much in my heart. I mean, I suppose he's all those things you say, but—and I thought to ask you before—do you feel any sort of heart connection?

**Gussnor:** I don't because I resist that. I've been doing a Bhakta path—very poorly perhaps—but they say that in the beginning the idea is in taking a chosen ideal' iswadevatha', the main rule at the beginning for a beginner is' nishta, firmness in one thing.

And Osho said in his book 'Dimensions Beyond the Known' that in the modern world people on paths would begin to make connections with other paths and they would go to this path and then to that, the paths would interconnect—that there



would be little side-paths connecting other paths. And that may be true-like the little tree that the Indians have that they put barrels and fences and bricks around so cows and goats won't nibble at them.

So I don't feel a heart connection, personally. But I did have in the camp on the seventh, eighth and ninth day, a feeling of the space in which witnessing happens. I always thought of it as empty space, like sky, but then I became aware that it was full of wisdom in love, and it must be full of love because the mental events-the ups and downs, the highs and lows-didn't matter. You could be generous to them, you could love them and everything was so all right that these little things didn't matter.

So I felt something about the heart chakra, receptivity, and love and that the witnessing space must be full of love-just the glimmering of that-and that's a heart connection to love, but not to him!

**Maneesha:** What about the feeling around the ashram-did you get feelings of love here?

**Gussnor:** Oh, yes. Sure! It's marvellous! It's like encounter groups that last a week and then you break up. Okay, there's a lot of crying but there's a lot of love in encounter groups. In an on-going encounter group that has other dimensions-discourse, meditation, social life, freedom, a radical ability to experience unpatterned behaviour-there's bound to be even more love and authenticity and joy than you would get in even the closest and highest kind of encounter group.

Oh, yes, I mean you just don't have to *feel* it, you can see it around - the way people are hugging each other. You can't help but feel it when you see that.

**Maneesha:** And how does it compare to other ashrams that you've been to?

**Gussnor:** Well, it's modern, It's loose. Of course every one has its own signature, mood and style-it would be very hard to compare them.

The' karmacholum in Vermont is a Tibetan Buddhist monastery and does a tranquillity meditation—they do long sitting –and then they try to do meditation in action in their work around the place. These are people who have been doing a lot of sitting—not dynamic meditation—but a lot of sitting for five years, and the mood there is undemonstrative. They see the games, they see they can't stop them, they see the irony of it, they see that the other person sees their games and their own games at the same time, and it makes for a kind of ironic humour and awareness that is charming, that plays much quieter. But it is very anti-nomian—people are very free.

Ramakrishna ashrams have an awful lot of singing, dancing, a lot of arti, evening vesper singing, a lot of use of image worship, a lot of attempts to change the unconscious mind and the conscious mind by developing positive qualities that washout the other qualities and then get rid of the positive qualities. It's not so much working with the positive and negative qualities simultaneously, as it is accentuating the positive qualities, so that there would be a sense of duty, there would be a sense of 'as you work, make Karma yoga'. But it's a much more gradual approach—they're not out to precipitate a crisis or put people under extreme stress. They don't use exhaustion and stress as a way to become aware of the objects, subject and space around it.

And they don't criticise anybody, because of the rule of Vivekananda—to be friends of all, but criticism is essentially negative and hasn't done much good from the beginning of the world. You never go from error to truth, you go from truth to truth; you don't go from wrong to write. You say, 'what you've been doing is good; now if you want to do one thing better, had you thought of this?' There's always that approach—a much more constructive approach. So there is that positive atmosphere there.

And if you go to Hyderabad centre—we stayed there four days—or any of the American centres, you see that they're very concerned about society and improving it, so the critique is there but it's always in a positive way. Society as a whole is not something that can never be good for the spiritual seeker.

There *could* be a society based on enlightenment as its reality value, so that the Ramakrishna people will talk against governments, this and that, but in an overwhelming positive context. So society as a whole, while it is seen as a conditioning, patterning thing, is not seen as inevitably a bad conditioner, a patterner. All conditioning, patterning, is not bad 'per se'.

My hunch is that probably for large numbers of young people and for a large number of Americans—I can't say anything about Europeans because I don't know that scene—we can't hear it right and we need to be told right at the beginning' Your free—do it!

I call Osho, Jerry Rubin plus. Jerry Rubin wrote a book' do it! But do it with awareness, and do it seeing it as a part of the growth process that you don't understand very well but which you have at the back of your mind; you know it's there.

I think that atmosphere .. .. well, obviously it is better because you get larger numbers of people.

**Maneesha:** And what about Osho's methods, his accent on catharsis, expression first?

**Gussnor:** It's better for inducting people, it's better for results. I think it's too soon for anybody to talk about results. The Tibetans are getting pretty amazing results, I think. Ramakrishna people get a lot of devotees who develop beautiful characters and stay with it over the long run.

They make sure that the character forms right, then make sure that the meditation deepens, and then they get something in the way of the awareness of the spirit, that's neither mental or physical, before they take the final things.

The neo- sannyas is different and I think it should be their .. ..I think everybody is ploughing in the same field. Somebody is ploughing over here by this Oak tree and somebody is ploughing over here by the rock fence, but it's all the field of the spirit, the spiritual practices, spiritual path, and experimentation, innovation. Even if it leads to conflicting ideas,



Ideas and ideals of sannyas, I think that the situation is so desperate, so hopeless and so fluid, that the more of this happens the better. You know, let's see what happens!

**Maneesh:** Can you talk about your experience of the meditation camp?

**Gussnor:** I found the kundalini meditation a really super one for me. I like the dynamic meditation. The first four days I thought I liked the Nadabrahma the best, especially holding the hands downward because it could still and silence all the thoughts—I just couldn't raise their heads. It was nice, but towards the seventh and eighth day, during the dancing and quiet part of the kundalini one, a lot of things came up. At that point I wasn't thinking.

I had been with the experience of trying to think it out, solve it trying to check on what was happening and file it away. I think it was the seeing this object and naming it and letting it subside that lead to spontaneous unplanned inrush of things, that weren't of the result of laboured thought.

And one of them had to do with what reverence meant, normal salutations. What does it mean to bow down to something, to revere something! Well, you know, it means whatever your conditioning or training has let it mean and it changes all the time.

And all of a sudden it came to me that if you stay in a space where you're aware of each thing, then to pay your respects to divinity—the spirit, to consciousness, to revere it, to worship it, to estimate it as worthy—means that you have first of all, the openness to whatever comes—good, bad, unflattering, shattering, frightening—to be on good terms with it, you love it.

And secondly, it means you have the energy to keep it up. And I'm not quite sure how trying and not trying, doing and not doing, allowing but also remembering—how those fallout. But I don't really care—surrender to that .. .. somehow It happens. And you need to stay with it—there needs to be a certain energy put into mindfulness of the object. A certain openness first and then certain energy, and I think that both things are

Involved in bowing to the spirit.

And so that's two sides of the quadrant. Another was the opposite side of the openness—and this was loving all; this was where the love part came in. In it all I have seen that before, there was accuracy and there was clarity and there was precision, but I hadn't seen, I hadn't felt, that there was love .. and that was something really good.

In other words, that the whole thing could not be, need not be a task, but could be a sharing, a celebration of love. And that's where what Osho said about sharing and expressing it, spreading it around and being open to it, came in. Of whole thing had a faint background of love, but I could hardly see it, hardly catch it was there.

And the fourth side of the quadrant was dignity, independence, absoluteness, isolation. In the midst of this whole process of 'Okay, I've got all the wrong habits and I always close up when I've got to be open'. Somehow there was also the sense that it was important to hold on. And it was a part of honouring the spirit (*there is some emotion in his voice*).. ..to know that I am that! In the midst of all this stuff there was a little opening to see maybe what the path is and the dialectics of it, to see that (moist-eyed) uh ..I am divine! I'm not just this mess of stuff.

So then I did dances bowing in all four directions and trying to really let go of them all. That's one thing that happened—feeling just what It means to honour the spirit for me, now.

What an ego trip! (He laughs, a little embarrassed).

**Maneesha:** Can you recall your experience at Darshan?

**Gussnor:** The main impression of Osho close-up was his total there-ness, his total happiness, his total gladness to see you, his human kindness with a resonant dimensionality, and the aptness and naturalness of his responses to the shifting situations of different people who came up.

**Maneesha:** Do you feel that something's been happening to you

while you've been here?

**Gussnor:** Oh, the process—very definitely! Most people couldn't go to any intensive meditation thing—like five times a day for ten days, and especially one that emphasises arousing the unconscious and allowing you catharsis and being aware of it in silence. You can't have that much meditation without feeling somethings happening that's tremendous!

There's been an extraordinary process of connections and integration, bringing things up, opening up new things to work on.

**Maneesha:** Do you feel what's happening here is going to spread far and wide!

**Gussnor:** I don't know about the future of it and its value. To me this neo-sannyas says 'I'm part of the consciousness revolution!' Replacing unawareness with awareness is important. Becoming not just conscious but having conscious awareness is the exciting thing that's happened in the world. It's the hope of humanity; it's the way forward. It's the solution to personal problems; it's the way of waking from sleep.

And the Orange says that to me—that for better or for worse, however far I get with it, I'm committed to give it to play. If you don't do it when you're young, when on earth will you ever do it? If you don't start out with some ideals in youth, how are you ever going to pick it up when you get older?

I suppose it's all right to have droves and droves of orange people all over who are saying, 'hey! Know yourself and know your own consciousness. Work at it and meditate. Do something with your life!' When you think of all the worse things that people could be doing—working and taking drugs or drinking, dying .. .. dying unimaginatively .. ..

**Maneesha:** Do you see people here who are committed in people who are growing?

**Gussnor:** Oh yes, yes, I see that. That form of growth for the majority of people seems to be taking the form first of all



getting in touch with fears and anger, and being fascinated with that for a couple of months. Then it is a finding that it does transmute and that something else comes in—fear, the inability to love, relations to this or that, being reserved or inhibited.

So most of the growth seems to be getting in touch with the objects and the emotions, getting freed up and then experiencing the bubbling madness and crying, but also the reaching out and the ability to take the risk.

And here you can take not only encounter groups but other types of groups—soma groups and vipassana groups and that sort of thing and can do it with some advice, some oversight, some attention to sequence, a chance to hear from other people who have been in it, what it's like. And I think as a growth centre, it offers more of your flexibility and variety, opportunity, in terms of quantitative terms than most people would find any place else.

It would be very interesting to see if after the catharsis and expression, people are allowed to be natural, if then the Taoist thing—but having gone into it and having got straightened out, having experienced that the human tendencies evolve, and asked 'what next?'—does lead people to insight meditation.

It's amazing to see how natural people are here. Makes you realise how far off centre joyless and loveless ordinary straight society is, how much unhappiness there is on people's faces. Oh, I think it's just beautiful!

